PROFESSIONAL EXPRESSION

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EBSCO Publishing : eBook Community College Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 3/19/2024 3:33 PM via AIKEN TECHNICAL COLLEGE
AN: 501153 ; Morris, M. D..; Professional Expression : To Organize, Write, and Manage for Technical Communication
Account: s8489886.main.ehost

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PROFESSIONAL EXPRESSION

TO ORGANIZE, WRITE, AND MANAGE TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

M. D. MORRIS, PE

F. ASCE; F. STC

MOMENTUM PRESS

MOMENTUM PRESS, LLC, NEW JERSEY

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First published in 2009 by
Momentum Press®, LLC
222 East 46th Street, New York, NY 10017
www.momentumpress.net

ISBN-13: 978-1-60650-071-2 (paperback)
ISBN-10: 1-60650-071-6 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-60650-072-9 (e-book)
ISBN-10: 1-60650-072-4 (e-book)

DOI forthcoming

Cover Design by Jonathan Pennell
Interior Design by Scribe, Inc.

First Edition June 2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

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for
Abraham Lincoln Morris
(1878–1958)
Mentor, Friend, Father
He taught me to design word pictures.

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FOREWORD

SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, AND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

—Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

How many times have we heard that the explanation or excuse for missing a goal or milestone was "poor communication"? Communication does not have to cause problems; communication can prevent them. *Professional Expression* by M. D. Morris, PE, shows you how to turn communication into an asset rather than a liability. Remember: The single greatest factor for advancement is your ability to convey your ideas.

Good communication involves taking what you've heard and learned through active listening and focused research, and then presenting that complex information in a clear and concise manner that can be understood easily by any audience. This book will help you do just that. It contains many proven approaches to developing and improving your communications skills. You'll learn helpful methods for organization and development, efficient writing techniques for report and proposal formats, and how to deliver successful oral presentations. Those chapters are intended to help you understand why each of those components plays a part in successful communication, and how they work together to heighten your communication competence.

Let's face it, most technical people get their education using numbers, not words. This book will help you choose your words carefully and use them in a practical way to improve your professional career.

Let me recommend that you read the book in its entirety first. Reread it to hone in on problem areas. Then practice, practice, and practice some more!

M. D. Morris, PE, has been teaching this course to our technical staff for the past six years, and it has made a significant difference in helping their level of technical communication become more professional and successful. As someone

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who has benefited firsthand from this new way to approach any communication task, believe me: It's a proven guide!

Francis J. Lombardi, PE
Chief Engineer
The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

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DISCLAIMER

I write this volume in full agreement with the fundamental fact of equality of women in the professional workforce. But consistently to write "he or she," "he/she," "his or hers," "his/hers" is inefficient, uneconomical, and distracting to the smooth flow of this narrative. To save time and money, I use the terms "he" and "his" as acronyms or symbols to be understood by all to mean "men, women, everyone," just as you would read the symbol π (pi) to mean 3.14159. . . .

All this material is original and may not be reproduced in any form without written permission. Attributed short quotes are permissible. I use real examples of good and bad writing to illustrate the point at hand. For the most part those have been produced in my classes since the beginning and are used with the full knowledge and consent of their writers. The positive ones are fully attributed. The bad ones remain anonymous to spare their originators any possible embarrassment.

Over the years since I first developed them in 1965, several parts of this text have appeared in numerous other publications as articles, editorials, contributed book chapters, or quotations. All stemmed originally from my own thoughts and have been used in all my teaching.

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PREFACE

This book is a practical expansion of contemporary plain professional English as it is spoken and written in the technical and administrative worlds. It is *not* an academic text after college English 101, nor does it deal with the language of current popular culture. This is a guide for all people whose livelihoods depend on their understanding, and their being understood.

Actually, I am passing along to you the strongest valid points from the experience I've gleaned after half a century of published writing, and editing, and more than forty years of teaching adult working practitioners.

Early in life my sage father taught me, "Profit from someone else's experience. If you can't, then profit from your own." Don't go through life wearing pairs of horse blinders and earplugs, caught up in the herd.

You need this system for your professional expression, to stay ahead of those who don't yet have it. Here is a new way to approach and accomplish *every* communication task. You no longer need to stare at a blank sheet of paper or a blank computer screen. Here, for all your writing and speaking assignments, you will find out where to start, and how to go.

Instead of the archaic writing procedure that has been taught since technology became a field apart from arts and letters, try a new protocol bereft of those outmoded limits and flaws. Replace the old routine of concocting an outline (of course, within the limits of your own knowledge), plugging in researched material, and writing. Then the writing would consist of an introduction, a body (facts and opinions), and a conclusion. All written in the impersonal third person, in the passive voice. All wrong!

Where in all that is the place for things *outside* your knowledge purview? You don't know what you don't know. This new approach can reveal the blind spots in your vista. Your written product via this method will read easier and more understandably, and thus be more useful to your target audience. In this world there are absolutely no absolutes.

From many diverse good ideas, I generated this procedure by amalgamating and organizing them for the first semester of my teaching career. That was in the

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evening school of continuing adult education at The Cooper Union in New York. My first son Gregory was born the night of my first (twenty-six-student) class. He has now become an independent writer, having gone past being editor-in-chief of a major industrial trade magazine.

Because this method worked the first time, I used it again the next semester, then in more than 800 short- and full-term credit courses with some 17,000 students. For professionals on the job, I condensed the high points into a short, in-house course of three eight-hour days that has earned excellent evaluations. Among the short packages were stints at NASA, Los Alamos, and many other federal installations, as well as for major industry and professional organizations. Full-term credit courses met with rewarding results at The Cooper Union, Columbia University Civil Engineering, and the MBA program at Cornell University.

There are no busywork exercises in here. This is a pragmatic tome written for use as a guide in the working world. Follow these exercises in parallel with your own job at hand. You may not get the results you seek on the first try, but with a little practice you shall. I've taught this in English in Japan, and in Spanish in the Caribbean; it worked well in both places.

Please note that although the firm rule of the road here is to keep it simple, as my old lawyer friend (when pushed about the opacity of his "legalese") would respond, "We never endeavor, we only try!" Herein, instead of the correct commonplace words, I deliberately use many multisyllabic words to get you to use your dictionary and broaden your horizons. Also, I suggest you read this all through once to "case the place," then keep it close at hand for ready reference.

Get into this natural, common-sense communication system with an open mind: it works with or without your computer. You'll find it a positive route to making your professional expression easier, more successful, and more enjoyable.

M. D. Morris, PE
Ithaca, NY
2008

ESSAYONS[1]

NOTE

1. From the Latin, "We shall try." The motto of the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although I am the originator of this work (concept through publication), I didn't arrive at this datum without aid along the way. Were I to thank all who helped, I'd need a full chapter, but eight persons among them generated significant effects on my writing life! I am grateful to every one of them. I name these eight because singly each appeared at a critical point to keep me on track and going ahead:

Frances Aigeltinger of P.S.166, who undertook to nurture this nascent narrator.

Harry Shefter of Stuyvesant High School, who taught me useful English for four of those eight terms.

Charles Kenneth Thomas, professor of public speaking at Cornell University (later department chairman), who, despite my resistance, took my New York "dead end" brogue and forged it into articulate discourse.

Dr. Ralph Palmer Agnew, Cornell professor of mathematics, who inspired me to realize I could be a teacher, and a writer.

William H. Quirk, PE, editor of *Contractors and Engineers Monthly*, who early on helpfully rescued my writing career at its lowest starting point.

Irwin Forman, PE, editor of *Ingeniería Internacional Construcción*, who confidently bought everything I filed from Latin America.

Dr. Johnson E. Fairchild of The Cooper Union, who invited me to teach my "good material" in his adult education evening school curriculum.

Anita Diamant Berke, a literary agent at the Overseas Press Club, who secured a publisher's contract for me to write *Okinawa*,[1] my first book.

Probably none of them is alive today, but unlike the "Wamba-dan" the turtle of old Chinese philosophy, I am not "one who has forgotten the eight."

I cannot overlook two more people, in on this finished effort: Joel Stein, publisher for Momentum Press, LLC, who had the astute good judgment to contract this project; and Elaine Meredith Guidero, who typed and retyped every manuscript page, in addition to spot research, and copy editing. Thanks to you all.

DO IT, DON'T DON'T IT![2]

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NOTES

1. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970.
2. Morton W. Jacobs, Esq. (1921–68).

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